

Self Discovery through Voice and Body

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Abstract

Theatre training is unique in the sense that it challenges the notions of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' mind, especially when it comes to movement and voice practice. Of course there is a focus on the performance outcome (whether it be scripted or improvised) but the foundations of performance are equally as important, which is sometimes referred to as 'pre-acting'. These necessary skills such as physical and vocal training, and improvisation form some of the foundations of acting. The student actor also needs to have an awareness of self and others, space and time. Being aware of personal habits, then having the skills to eliminate them, and adapting one's own voice and body is empowering. Also dealing with other performance and having an awareness of space prepares them for the stage and beyond. This paper will discuss how I have experimented and combined various Western and non-Western voice and movement methods in order to assist the unlocking of imagination, creativity and discovery of self.

Keywords: Voice, Movement, Performance, Conscious, Pre-acting, Suzuki

Self-ownership

Actor training is unique in the fact that it is one of the only disciplines where the concentration and focus is on the individual. The student performer is the instrument and the player all in one. The student themselves are the subject, and this poses some challenges. For a start, the student performer must have an objective viewpoint, that is what their character is doing in terms of intention, motivation, objective and so on while simultaneously being aware of their bodies and voices, the other performers on stage (how they are affecting others, how they interact, act and react with them), and the audience. This may seem fairly complicated and esoteric, but this notion of awareness is also essential in everyday life. Actor training, particularly the skills of movement and vocal work, assist the individual in dealing with physical, spatial, vocal and communicative awareness that one needs in daily life.

I will be discussing various core elements of physical and vocal training, primarily looking at some of the training aesthetics of the Frank Suzuki Actor Knowhow (FSAK), developed in Brisbane, Australia. John Nobbs, one of the founders of the FSAK and Ozfrank Theatre Matrix has been associated with Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki since 1991 and throughout the past two decades years, he, along side Jacqui Carroll and other company members have been analysing what makes Tadashi Suzuki's training so powerful, profound, practical and actor proof. The FSAK has evolved since 1992 as a regional variant of the SATM, 'to empower the actor within a very physical pre-cognitive experience.'¹ It is their belief that, whilst originally created and developed in Japan, the SATM is fundamentally a universal training system that is suitable for any culture, any theatre aesthetic, and essentially everybody, regardless of age, race or sex.

The notion of 'self' initially seems prominent in the training, but it is very much connected with the Ego/Consciousness, an element which in most actor training is encouraged to be abandoned. Not only are these physical and vocal training methods of the FSAK beneficial for the performer, they are affective training methods for the non-actor as well, as they create awareness of immediate surroundings, other people, and mind/body connection. The core and the esoteric notion of the 'Centre' (capitalised as a point of difference from the conventional use of *centre*, i.e. centre of the body) will also be discussed as this creates an awareness of a deeper sense of the physical and creative self. The difference between meditative and performative notions of training will also be covered and an explanation of levels of awareness with the triangle of concentration will be discussed in relation to specific FSAK exercises.

In a workshop conducted by John Nobbs and Jacqui Carroll in the FSAK, Jacqui, after stopping a practical exercise due to actors not paying attention, stated something somewhat profound, yet very apparent.

‘The only thing you own in the world is your body’, she stated and their statements like ‘this is one of the only types of practical work where you will truly discover yourself’ and ‘by doing this work, you will find your *centre*’ were also resonating. The last statement was re-iterated throughout the workshops and post-workshops discussion. In fact, it seemed as though the work of the FSAK, and the SATM from which the FSAK was influenced, revolved around this concept of the Centre, which will be discussed later on.

In his book *The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki*, Paul Allain, Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Kent, described one of Suzuki’s challenging exercises called Sitting Statues:

[The actor should] move from a relaxed, seated tucked ball to balancing the buttocks, with the head and body facing forwards and the arms loosely circling the legs...[then] pull the spine and head up to make the back straight and keep the centre revealed.²

Prominent, influential voice teacher Kristin Linklater refers to the Centre in her publications and in her teachings, particularly in her book, *Freeing the Natural Voice*. The term Centre, as Linklater stated:

[M]eans one thing to Martha Graham, another to Michael Chekhov and other things to others and me. It is a practical word, but only if one does not defy it to the point of searching for it as the Holy Grail containing Absolute Truth...[W]orking from it clears the mind and focuses energy.³

This statement clarifies the fact that the Centre can be pinpointed to one specific place. It can also be transient, shifting from one place to another.

Firsthand experience with the FSAK solidified the notion of ‘being’, engaging the physical and metaphorical Centre and being conscious of the flow of energy throughout the entire body energising the muscles, flesh, bones, breath and voice. It was not really about being clever, consciously making choices for the sake of being interesting; it was knowledge of ‘self’ in any given moment; the conscious mind saying ‘I am here’ and the unconscious mind saying ‘I am being’. In all this, there was a great deal of attention to the notion of feeling, and attention to the ‘essence’ of a character rather than its intellectual, action driven attributes.

One of the dichotomies that is evident in the training and performance of this method is the amalgamation of Physical Crisis with vocal and physical freedom. John Nobbs stated that the performer needs to have strength, or power, with softness and that there is a distinct difference between tension and intensity. This was demonstrated in the walks and Stomping exercises seen in both the SATM and the FSAK.

Training in the FSAK makes the participant aware of the physical Centre at all times. With each step and stomp, the performer is aware of being ‘in the moment’, while also being aware of the energy transference from one leg to the other. Each step should not be wasted, even through physical exhaustion, each moment of contact with the ground must be savored because that is the driving force of creativity and energy which will manifest itself thought the entire body, breath and voice. What is felt on the inside shows on the outside.

There was a distinct difference of energy level and power between the physical presences of standing and moving that is demonstrated by conventional Western voice practitioners and the FSAK approach: one can be referred to as passive, and the other as active. The FSAK does not support physical tension in any way whatsoever; rather, it focuses on both an internal sense of mental and physical energy that is transferred to the audience. This encourages the performer to develop a heightened sense of physical, mental and vocal awareness that is directed outwards to achieve a performative level of experience rather than a private, internal experience.

The FSPK encourages the performer to gently activate the lower back while keeping the spine tall while obeying the natural curvature, bending the knees slightly and at the same time being aware of where their Centre at all times. No tension should be evident throughout the body. Nobbs stated that the voice therefore should be pushing down into the pelvic girdle. According to voice and movement pioneer, Joan Melton, this is what singers call ‘the “down and out method” [which] would help to produce some powerful sounds, but would also work against the way the body naturally breathes.’⁴ naturally, people are meant to breathe the way nature would have intended. This is the ‘in and up’ manner by which the abdominal area releases and protrudes during the inhalation, and retracts during the exhalation, as opposed to the ‘down and out’ method of consciously protruding the belly both in inhalation and exhalation.

The simple fact is that the voice must come from the body, and this is what FSAK continually reiterate. Jerzy Grotowski also mentioned that the body comes first.

In terms of the FSAK, the voice must not be manipulated in any way whatsoever; this inhibits the truth. It is up to the workshop leader to discern whether or not the voice sounds as though it was manipulated. By manipulation, Nobbs and Carroll mean the performer having a preconceived notion of what the voice should sound like before getting into a particular physical position. This is premeditated and therefore a denial of natural impulse. What is truly interesting is for the actor to feel their Centre in that particular physical position, whether it is a standing or Sitting Statue, and release an open sound from that state. Of course, when asked to produce specific vowel sound, there needs to be some degree of pharyngeal construction, after all, any movement or sound needs to have some degree of conscious action. What is important though is the resultant sound; the voice should not 'act', it should 'be'.

The vocal work generated from the FSAK, via the SATM is non-conventional and confronting. In voice training, emphasis is placed on revealing the performers natural voice. Rodenburg and Linklater are on the same path as Suzuki, even though they are aesthetically and culturally dissimilar. The path of finding the inner truth by connecting the whole of the performer to their voices is shared no matter what culture. FSPK is not interested in conveying any colour in the words spoken during training. Carroll mentioned by making the words and meaning sound beautiful, 'its just elocution, and its tedious, and it's ugly. It's not anything.'⁵ What is truthful and more interesting is when the sound is generated from the deepest parts of the performers Centre. If the performer focuses on the sound alone, rather than the meaning of the words, the natural, organic meaning would emerge. It is a physical reaction rather than an intellectual one. Voice work in SATM or FSAK training is confronting because performers do not use their conventional, habitual voices: they use a voice that is nothing but quotidian.

Art vs. Science: The Centre and the Core

Before I discuss how physical and vocal training for the actor may assist in self-discovery, awareness and control, I will explain, in detail, the concept of Centre and the core. The Centre is a term often used in theatre training, particularly in the areas of voice and body. The teacher or director will sometimes ask the performer to Centre their voice, or even walk, move and act from the Centre. But what is this Centre, and what does it mean? Is discovering the all-elusive Centre the key to self-discovery?

One member of the Roy Hart Theatre, a prominent experimental theatre company based in the south of France, in a documentary about the group, explained that the extreme use of pitch was developed to 'connect...all the various centres of energy in [their] body.'⁶ How can this be possible? Can the body contain more than one Centre?

Lets put art and esoteric imagery to one side and have a look at the physiological truth. To me, the core and the Centre are two different elements. The core is a description of the centre of the body and so if a performer is told to 'speak from the core'; the creative and conceptual stimuli may be limited. They may brace the abdominal muscles and force the sound out. If, on the other hand, they are told to 'speak from the Centre', which is far more esoteric, then emotion, imagination and creativity play a part.

Core strength training have been popular in recent years, however the abdominal muscles are overrated when it comes down to real core strength and conditioning. We tend to focus on that whole abdominal area, but in fact there are many other muscles in that region that are more crucial. These muscles play many roles, like stabilising the spine and the pelvis, protecting the back, providing a firm base for physical movement and making it possible to perform many different movements like standing up, transfer energy, or move in absolutely any direction.

Realistically, when you look at all the possible movements one can do, the abdominal muscles have somewhat limited and specific actions. What exactly are the core muscles? Generally, the core muscles run the full length of the trunk of the body and when engaged, stabilise the spine and pelvis and create an overall support for the body in order for it to move in all directions. The function of the core is to stabilise the thorax and the pelvis during dynamic movement. We are then able to generate powerful movements of the extremities.

Anders Begmark, Professor of Solid Mechanics and University of Lund in Sweden, coined the terms Local and Global Stability Systems in 1989. Bergmark stated that the Local System 'consists of muscles with insertion or origin (or both) at lumbar vertebrae, whereas the Global System consists of muscles with origin on the pelvis and insertions on the thoracic cage.'⁷

The Local muscle groups are attached directly to the lumbar vertebrae, thus providing specific segmental spinal stability while the Global System provides large trunk movements and general trunk stability. These are attached between the thorax and pelvis and/or pelvis and legs with no particular attachment to the lumbar spine. Local may also be referred to the 'inner unit' and Global as 'outer unit'.

There is also a very important muscle that separates the thoracic cavity (lungs, heart and ribs) from the abdominal cavity and is the body's major muscle of inhalation. This is the diaphragm. When the diaphragm contracts, it creates room for the lungs to fill and expand downwards, lowering the contents of the abdomen, which makes the stomach protrude. "Breathe into your belly" is a common phrase, but what is felt when your stomach is expanding is the result of the lungs expanding downwards, pushing the contents of the stomach forwards. Shallow breathing is when the breath action is in the chest, while diaphragmatic, or abdominal breathing is considered 'deep breathing.'

Most exercises practiced in the FSAK and the SATM engage core muscle groups, and the participant may further brace their abdominal muscles in order to hold those particular positions rather than allowing their correct muscles to do the work. Simply, 'correct' muscles are engaged when the participant does not consciously brace any unnecessary additional muscles in a move or stance. Performers may be able to handle this physically but the difficulty arises when they speak, or vocalise in these positions. The body is trying to maintain that position while the voice is striving to be open and free. The freedom is in the mind and the body, therefore when engaging in these exercises it is important for the participant to keep in mind two key points: they are grappling with the notion of freedom when using the voice whilst in these challenging positions. They are simultaneously being free while in a state of extreme physical engagement; their core is doing the work for them, providing stability and balance and the inspiration, imagination and stimuli are generated from the Centre.

The breath, voice and body work as a continuum in order to achieve the most clarity out of the most miniscule movement to the largest of all expressions, from a whisper to the largest vocalisations. The three aspects of clarity are mental (which refers to the clarity of thought, the intellectual choices, the clarity of expression of the inner imagery), physical (clarity of movement, however big or small) and vocal (ability to clearly express the thought and the emotion through the voice through large or small sounds). These need to work together in an economic and functional way. The energy that charges the muscles for breathing, speaking and moving, initially needs to be deeply perceptive.

When discussing this feeling, sensation or impulse, it is quite common to refer to it as the Centre. The Centre in terms of meaning and location is ubiquitous. Through research and practical engagement with the FSAK, coupled with various other personal vocal and physical works, I have come to the conclusion that the Centre has many meanings. The Centre can be one aspect of the body and yet it can be everything; there is an energy Centre and a breath Centre; there is a transposing Centre; and an emotional Centre.

The Centre can move; it can transform and rearrange itself, however, you cannot argue the fact that the physiological centre of the body is the core. It is natural and scientifically true. However, there may be imaginary Centres of the body. Take for instance the forehead. The actor, with the assistance and support of the physiological core, can add another Centre, that being the forehead, hand, lower back, or wherever. The centre of the body must come first and the other Centre is an extension of that initial, more fundamental one.

All these Centres work together. The physiological core, which includes all those complex muscles, provides a structural and muscular support for breath, movement and the voice. This 'house' is necessary for the other esoteric and creative elements to flow freely through the body, keeping in mind that: a) the emotional Centre begins in the physical centre of the body, is tightly connected to the intellect, and is eventually manifested through body and voice and: b) Although the physical Centre or core of the body cannot possibly move from where it is, other parts of the body can be the second Centre and these can shift and change.

Therefore, the Centre is simply a point at which something starts, whether it is inspiration (referring to the two meanings: breathing in and intellectual and emotional stimulation), physical (the anticipation of any physical action) or vocal (an invisible action fuelled by the breath). It is a creative term. It may refer to both the physiological core of the body, which includes many different muscles, and the esoteric centre, which is somewhere between the belly button and the groin, between the left and right hips.

To locate the Centre, you need to have an awareness of the physiological core and the esoteric Centre – the understanding and awareness of biology and creativity. The Centre (raw and instinctual) needs to work with the intellect (the logical) and being aware of it allows the individual to experience the inner self and pierce the core of the imagination.

Quotidian and the Quintessence

I have looked at some key aspects of voice and movement training – that is unpacking the difference between the all-elusive Centre and the core. This may be up to the individual actor to experience these dichotomies in action, and to really decipher the meanings behind them. From these elements, we can now move on to the larger concept of performer training in terms of voice and body. In my observations, there seems to be two types of voice and movement training: the quotidian and the quintessence. I am not advocating one above the other; they are equally as important, but in different ways.

Quotidian can refer to a ‘meditative’ notion of training whereby the performer trains internally for the sake of self-development and/or in preparation for the ‘play’. ‘Performative’, or quintessence, on the other hand allows the performer to be ready for the ‘performance’. This may be an indication of the difference between Oriental and Occidental performance practice.

Some Oriental methods act as an alternate to the Stanislavski method which is ‘based on an understanding of the way we behave in our daily lives, which [is then used] when creating a character.’⁸ Tatsumi Hijikata, one of the founders of Butoh, an avant-garde Japanese performance movement, stated that in the ‘Stanislavski system... man finds himself in a narrow and constricted world’⁹. Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski (to name a few) have explored the relevance of Oriental performance practice. The investigation of oppositional tensions and training aesthetics to some degree can be classed as ‘performative’.

Some voice work for actors is implemented in what I call a meditative state. Actors engage in these exercises for various reasons, whether it is for personal development and growth in the context of actor training, or to improve overall communication skills. The overall objective, or their overall outcome may be overlooked. If the latter is the desired outcome, then practicing these in a meditative way will only get them as far as their personal physical framework and intellect. In a sense they are preparing the instrument (their voices and bodies), but not the instrument in the context of performance. In a sense, they are practicing their core but not their Centre.

The Performative notion was borrowed from various experiences in working with diverse practitioners and companies who train in Oriental or non-Western training and performance aesthetics. Performative, for example, means finding a balance between exercising various physio-vocal techniques on a personal level, while integrating awareness of the imagined audience in the training space. By practicing on this level and being aware of all elements of performance, not just ones-self, the actor is ready for performance, as opposed to being ready for the play. For example, meditative and performative can constitute as:

Meditative

- Awareness of self
- Personal development and growth
- Performer/context focused
- Voice, movement, or ‘character’ work as exercise

Performative

- Awareness of self in relation to others and audience
- Personal development in performance context
- Performer/context/audience focused
- Voice, movement, or ‘character’ work as exercise in performance context

Dissection of a Teddy Bear and the Time and Space Factor

Both the FSAK and the SATM deal with performative/quintessence training. I will discuss several original FSAK exercises designed by Nobbs and Carroll, colloquially called the Wall/Teddy Bear exercise. In order to interrogate Suzuki’s original exercises, the company embarked on their own voyage of self-discovery, which in turn enabled them to develop and create their own extensions and unique take to the exercises.

The universal value of Suzuki's training would be obscured if the FSAK would just replicate them in their private and public training; therefore the unique adaptations of the originals allow the work to extend beyond the foundations.

One of the exercises that has a profound affect on the individual is the Tenteketen: Off the Wall with Teddy Bears exercise. The *Slow Ten Tekka Ten* or the *Tenteketen*, an original Suzuki exercise, is a good starting point for physical grounded-ness and location and activation of the centre.

Actors position themselves in the space, the most efficient way is for half to line up at Stage Left and the other half Stage Right, facing each other, making sure that there are gaps directly in front to stop people colliding. The training music begins; the performers start to bend their knees slowly, lowering their centre of gravity, sensing their weight sinking through the feet and into the floor. At a certain point in the music, they walk forward and traverse the space. They sense their spine lengthening and chest softening, and when they reach the end of the room, making sure their upstage foot (the foot which is not facing the audience) is forward, they turn 180 degrees and proceed to go to the other side of the room, and so on.

The exercise is about journeys: where you have been, where you are, and where you are going. It is about feeling your way through time and space and transforming your whole being as you move through that space. It is very important for an actor to feel this change, and to also express it. If you are truthful to that change, and experience that journey, then the audience will go on a journey with you.

In the *Frank Suzuki Actor Knowhow Training Manual* published in 2010 alongside the *Self Discovery in a Silver Room* DVD, Nobbs describes the exercise:

This version begins with the actors facing the back wall. One hand must be placed on the wall and both feet and the hand must remain still for the introduction to the song during which the face and body turn gradually to face fully front to be still on a certain chord just before the song proper starts.

(Meanwhile the teddies, facing upstage, have been sitting patiently down the front in the corridor of their respective actor).

As the song proper starts [Slim Whitman's *Rose Marie*], the actors start to focus on and move towards the teddies in a freeform improvisation and, on a certain guitar note, they must pick the teddies up, in whatever manner they feel. They then retreat back upstage to the spot on the wall where they first started, with the teddies facing the audience, to finish in a position similar to the start. After the music's over they say a speech three times in three different ways.

1. Standard way. □
2. As if they were a teddy bear. □
3. A compound of teddy and their first speech.¹⁰

The overall important elements to be conscious about (or in fact not consciously think about) are initial impulses, vulnerability, openness and connectedness, which are all necessary elements of performance. Impulses are necessary to not only demonstrate truth in any action but to trust first instincts. Openness and vulnerability are one and the same, which is essential for creativity – to unlock an 'inner self', to be open, sensitive and empathic. Vulnerability is a frightening thing; once performers start to be conscious of this vulnerability, the self-consciousness is evident to the audience. This vulnerability, however, allows performers to experience (and expose) the truthful body and voice, which can be empowering. Connectedness in terms of the performer and teddy bear, the performer and the space, and the performer and others who share that same space are also crucial. These elements compel the performer to strip away all intellectualisations, preconceptions and all the peripheries of acting. They have no 'bag of tricks' to fall back on.

There is, I think, a difference between the energy level between the physical presences of standing and moving in conventional Western voice practices and the FSAK approach: one may be referred to as passive (e.g., meditative), and the other as active (e.g., performative). The exercise does not encourage physical tension whatsoever, as tension is counterproductive. It focuses on both an internal sense of mental and physical energy that is transferred to the audience (and the other performers in the room), and back to the performer. No tension should be evident throughout the body. The voice therefore should be allowed to go down into the pelvic girdle, which is what singers call the "down and out method" which would help to produce some powerful sounds, but would also work against the way the body naturally breathes.

People are meant to breathe the way nature would have intended: the in and up manner by which the abdominal area releases and protrudes during the inhalation, and retracts during the exhalation, as opposed to the 'down and out' method of consciously protruding the belly both in inhalation and exhalation. This encourages the performer to develop a heightened sense of physical, mental and vocal awareness that is directed outwards to reach a performative level rather as opposed to a private, internal experience.

Relevance to Other Acting Methods

Taking part in this exercise allows the actor to understand the links between what was experienced, and several other acting methods and techniques, in particular Uta Hagen. In her book published in 1991, *A Challenge for the Actor*, Hagen describes The Human Techniques, which are The Self, Transference, The Physical Senses, The Psychological Senses, Animation and Expectation. Without going into too much detail, these Human Techniques can be adapted to this exercise.

The exercise can be dissected into 6 steps, but actors are not encouraged to focus on them when engaging in it. They are to be used as an afterthought, a result of the 'do first and think later' approach. After experiencing it, I revisited the work while being aware of these steps, but not consciously expressing them. In my experience, there are two sections of the exercise, the first concerns taking the bear back to the starting point (complete physical action), and the other is verbal action (the use of the voice). The actions can be dissected in these six steps. The brackets refer to the journey:

1. Stillness and then the reveal, the turn, the first moment of action on stage (The dynamic stillness is almost like a depiction, or a still frame of where you have been. The interesting thing here is the audience thinking 'where did he/she come from? What happened just before? The turn merges the past and the present).
2. Heading towards the bear (Now progressing to the first step of the journey, the where are you going).
3. Contact with the bear, lifting it off the ground (Now we notice the change. The audience must see that change, mentally, physically and spiritually).
4. Taking the bear back to the wall (Now after experiencing that change, the 'heading back' should encapsulate that change, carrying with you both the experiences of the journey there, and the new experience of heading back. This is the return).
5. Turning your body and face to the wall, keeping the bears face at the audience (In a sense, revisiting the past).
6. Speaking (Expressing what has been before you vocally).

Generally, there are two very major parts of the exercise. The first are steps 1 to 5, a long series of physical actions, and the last step is 6, the verbal action. Having mentioned this, it may seem as though the performance, or demonstration of the exercise would be quite thin in terms of actions, objectives and general movement, both vocally and physically. In fact, there is so much going on, without consciously trying to do anything. The fascinating aspect is the minute details the body (and voice) reveals while experiencing various states, and these details are true facets of the performers unconscious at play. This exercise, therefore, reduces the visual noise, the 'tricks' and the busyness that detracts the audience from looking at the most important aspect of the actor (and the story of course). This busyness means the actor trying to fiddle with things (props, set) or themselves (clothes, body, hair), investing the emotion, intention and action through the handling of the object.

The performers relationship to objects are very important, not so much 'how' it is done (e.g. "I might pick the teddy bear up like this next time' or 'how do I make this lift interesting") or the actual action of the lift ("I just want to pick it up!"), but the space between the actor and the object, and the time it takes to lift the object. It's unexciting if actors anticipate any action, as the audience knows they're going to pick the object up; what is fascinating is the 'how'. Not the 'how' of the conscious, which I explained previously, but the 'how' of the action. By focusing on the simple task of the exercise, what are left are the pure essence of the simple action, the pure intent and the truth of the moment.

Levels of Awareness and the Triangle of Concentration

Off the Wall with Teddy Bears exercise is laced with conventional actor training influences without consciously trying to have any reference to it. Like any good exercise that works in a practical sense, it has a clear journey that deals with concepts relating to time and space. There are other affective FSAK exercises that deal with the notion of time/space awareness.

Both FSAK and SATM use sticks in their training, and some exercises, such as ones that are adapted from the Tenteketen, the use of a broom. In fact, sticks are widely used in movement training as a balancing aid, or it can be a prop that transforms into anything imaginable which allows the performer to use their imagination and make visible the invisible. The stick itself is not treated like a prop in the FSAK; an object that is external from the body that has its own life, rather, it is an extension of the body. I will outline how the stick is used in three different ways in the FSAK, and how it relates to the triangle of awareness.

First of all, a primary exercise from the SATM that has been adapted and developed from the SATM is the Tenteketen. A stick or broom is used especially for beginners because, according to Nobbs:

when contact with the floor, [performers] amplify the idea of the body's centre moving horizontally in space. When doing [the]...Tenteketen the actors sensing of the broom's caressing of the ground heightens their awareness of their movement across the floor. The broom also becomes an extension of the body, adding reach and charisma.¹¹

An extension of this exercise is when the participant is asked to place the stick on the ground at a certain point in the exercise on the command of the director or workshop leader. The performer is then asked to speak a memorised piece of text in various ways such as pointing to the stick and speak to the audience, pointing to the stick and speak to the stick, pointing to the stick and looking at the audience while speaking to the person who is next them/the other end of the room/behind them, and other variations.

There are two elements: level of awareness and a triangle of concentration. One level of awareness in play is physical awareness (what actors are showing to the audience or the outside world). This is shown by the external facets of the performer, for example, the obvious pointing at the stick and overt looking at the audience. These are actions that cannot be ignored, as they are profound gestures. The other level is mental awareness (what is happening inside the performers imagination/mind). This lies in the subtext, the underlying energy of the performer and is represented by the thoughts such as the performer 'speaking' to another performer in the space who may be behind them as they look straight ahead and point to the stick. The outward action indicates that they are looking at their audience and interacting with an external prop, but their inner motivation and subtext is focused to the other performer who is not in their sightline.

Nobbs and Carroll do not explicitly mention the 'triangle of concentration' in their training; it is a term that was coined after analysing various exercises and the performers relationships between themselves and the outer environment. The triangle consists of the actor/performer's relationship with the space (which may include other actors/performers and periphery objects/props not crucial in the specific, direct action), the immediate object/prop (the object the actor/performer is directly associating with) or the other actor/character they are speaking to, and the overall implicit awareness of the audience.

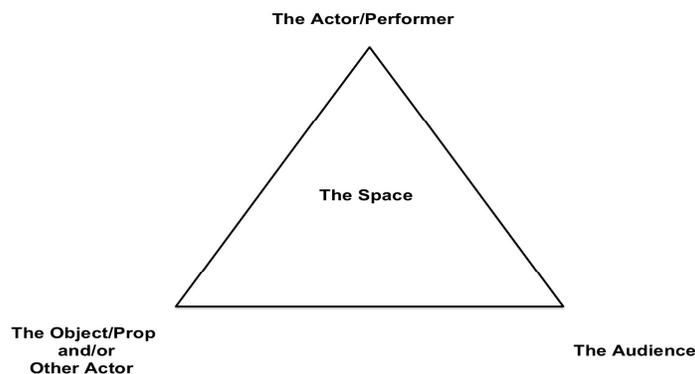


Figure 1: Triangle of Concentration

Source: Robert Lewis 2013.

The actor/performer stands in the space, but is also part of the space itself. They may focus their attention to the stick, for example, 'speaking to the stick' in order to transfer certain energy, or thought to that prop, or more significantly, talking to another actor.

This is even more significant as there is a two-way communication in play: an action and a reaction. The performer must be aware of the audience at all times when engaging in FSAK or SATM training. The triangle concentration, taking into account the audience, works as a continuum as there are no real initiating points.

The FSAK and the Development of Self

The notion of self in terms of self-development, self-awareness and as a holistic sense has been discussed intermittently in this paper.

As a performer or student actor, the emphasis has been self in response and in relation to other actors and the audience. The notion of ‘how am I going to affect the other character and ‘what do I want the other character to do in order for me to achieve my goal/objective’, and so on, is very much a standard way of thinking. The emphasis is placed on the other actor (i.e., ‘how am I going the other character’) but there is still a big emphasis on ‘self’ working in a continuum with the ‘other’.

When John Nobbs was asked how the FSAK developed self in their training, he responded by stating that the ‘FSAK doesn’t so much develop the ‘self’ as create an operational zone where the ‘self’ can flourish, unfettered by the sometimes destructive domination by the Ego/Conscious side of the brain.’¹² Nobbs claims that this is a fundamental issue in conventional actor training and that the FSAK addresses this by using exercises that:

devolve the authority of the Ego to a subsidiary function’. This is done, much like its inspiration - the SATM, by exposing the actor to highly energised and highly reduced repetitive exercises. Some of the exercises can cause discomfort, thus placing the actor in physical positions and poses that are quite difficult to achieve in order to challenge them and allowing them to understand their limitations in terms of physical and vocal ability and agility. The Ego/Consciousness then ‘homologates the instinctive discoveries into the combined psyche at a suitable time *after* the event.’¹³

According to Nobbs, Tadashi Suzuki was the first theatre pedagogue to deeply understand that rigorous, repetitive and highly energised training that is fundamentally more physical than mental could only dissolve the Ego/Consciousness. The FSAK has taken the Eastern principles of the SATM, identified them, and developed them to make it more accessible to a Western mindset. It takes the fundamental basics of Suzuki’s practice, yet finds ways in which it is relevant to contemporary Australian actors.

The Benefits of the FSAK to Non-Actors

I have discussed the benefits of training for the actor; however, more and more non-actors are undertaking acting classes for various personal and professional reasons. The most common reason is to develop confidence, with the others being to feel more physically comfortable and to develop some voice and speech skills. Communication skills are increasingly becoming relevant and important in the workforce. Employers not only need to have ideas, but they need to affectively communicate them. Many corporate sectors are encouraging their employees to engage in professional development from time to time and some employers choose to do specialised acting or public speaking classes, which develop communication skills.

According to Nobbs, ‘any pure physical experience is valuable for a human being’¹⁴ hence the prevalence and importance of sporting and other recreational activities. Theatre training is not dissimilar. Nobbs continues to argue that cultures that are not reliant on technology employ rituals that reengage the individual to their visceral centre with the ‘real’ world, the real world being the environment. One of the ritualistic elements of training in both the FSAK and SATM is the stomp/stamp, or *Ashibumi* (foot stamping) exercise. There are variations of this exercise, but the actor primarily stamp continuously and vigorously either randomly (in the Stamp and *Shakuhachi* exercise¹⁵ or forward in a straight line (in the *Ashibumi* (Foot Stamping) exercise.¹⁶ The basic philosophy and practice of the stamp remain the same, no matter what exercise.

The FSAK believe that their training benefits non-actors. Nobbs states that ‘it is the heuristic transformative/interrogative nature of the [Suzuki Actor Training Method and the Frank Suzuki Actor Knowhow] that has value for a layman as much as an actor in Western society.’¹⁷ The training aesthetic has a high performativity index, meaning that the exercises themselves are treated as performance rather than pure self-development. The craft and the performance elements merge together and individuals train with an awareness of an imagined audience that increases awareness and level of concentration.

Therefore, the notion of ‘self’, as in Ego/Consciousness dissolve, and the individual – whether they are actors or non-actors – are forced into a situation where they interrogate rather than discovering themselves.

Conclusion

It is evident that the training aesthetics of the SATM and FSAK focuses not so much on the development of ‘self’, rather, it interrogates the individual, as the notion of ‘self’ implies strong connections to the Ego/Consciousness. This interrogation allows the individual to have an awareness and understanding of the concept of both the core (scientific and physiological) and the centre (creative and esoteric). Placing the individual in difficult physical placements and challenging situations heighten their level of awareness.

Add to that the concept of the triangle of concentration, the performer, or participant learns how negotiate themselves in time and space, learns how to deal with others within, around and beyond (i.e., the audience) that space, and learns to be aware of others and objects around them. These are fundamental physical and vocal skills that are necessary for communication and the creation of presence.

Notes

1. Quoted in John Nobbs, *The Devil Pokes the Actor* (Brisbane: Frank Theatre Press, 2010), 2.
2. Quoted in Paul Allain, Paul, *The Art of Stillness: The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki* (London: Methuen, 2002), 112.
3. Quoted in Kristen Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*. (Hollywood: Drama Publishers, 1976), 136.
4. Joan Melton, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2010.
5. Jacqui Carroll, pers. comm, January 30, 2010.
6. Quoted in Roy Hart, *Theatre of Being* (Roy Hart Theatre Archives, 1964).
7. Quoted in Anders Bergmark, Anders, “Stability of the lumbar spine. A Study in Mechanical Engineering.” Abstract in *ACTA Orthopaedica Scandinavica Supplementium* 60, no. 230 (1989).
8. Quoted from Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski and The Actor* (London: Methuen, 1998), 2.
9. Quoted from Nourit Messon-Sekine and Jean Viala, *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* (Yokyo: Shufunotomo, 1988), 185.
10. Quoted from John Nobbs, *Frank Suzuki Actor Knowhow Training Manual* (Melbourne: Contemporary Arts Media, 2010), 18-19.
11. *Ibid.*, 40.
12. John Nobbs, e-mail message to author, September 17, 2012.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Quoted from Ian Carruthers and Takahashi Yasunari, *The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* (UK: Cambridge, 2004), 86-87.
16. *Ibid.*, 92.
17. John Nobbs, e-mail message to author, September 17, 2012.

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